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Historical International Relations and International Political Thought

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Abstract

This paper critically surveys recent developments in the subfield of Historical International Relations (IR). It looks at the evolution of Historical IR as a particular approach to the study of IR, and examines its development through competing approaches offered by contemporary scholars. The paper suggests that this subfield provides an insightful and innovative branch of scholarship in contemporary IR, which can pave the way to new futures of the discipline. In particular, the chapter explores in depth the various interactions between Historical IR and International Political Thought (IPT), which has recently gained greater prominence in the discipline of History. The paper argues that the dialogue between these two approaches to the study of the international – Historical IR and IPT – can be mutually enriching, but also embodies some methodological limits. Finally, the paper offers some ways forward in the intersection of Historical IR and IPT.

1. Introduction

In recent years, International Relations (IR) scholarship has cultivated a growing interest in history. In a parallel movement, scholars of political thought have dedicated greater attention to the international sphere of political relations, giving rise to the field of International Political Thought (IPT) at the intersection of history and theory. These intellectual developments emphasise, we suggest, the shared awareness of the importance of ideas in shaping the international realm, both in the present day and historically: by drawing on historical sources, IPT offers a wider, more variegated temporal vista on the evolution of international concepts and structures, while Historical IR scholarship frequently embraces the study of past ideas as a key to understanding politics beyond the state. This chapter seeks to explore some of the recent works in Historical IR and IPT, highlighting the common traits in the two strands of scholarship, in particular the emphasis on the importance of past ideas for understanding the international realm.

IR scholars have long found in History a useful depository of past examples and case studies. Yet, often such intellectual endeavours employed historical knowledge in a superficial or simplistic manner. Lack of direct engagement with a variety of primary and archival sources, as well as a selective use of secondary sources and historical studies have not allowed IR scholars to explore the whole range of possibilities contained within the study of the past. The rise of Historical IR as a distinct sub-field of IR has announced a concrete aim to transform the interaction between IR scholars and History.

Captured in IR mythology as the second great debate between ‘scientific’ and ‘historical’ approaches, the stark disciplinary divide between IR and History would seem to have been cemented with the rise of professionalisation in post-Second World War academia. By then, the need for distinction and separation enhanced the distance between IR and History, encouraging

scholars on both ends to engage in academic activities within the recognized boundaries of their discipline. Nonetheless, turning back to the origins of the discipline of IR, one cannot but notice that many of the early propagators and scholars of international relations, were, in fact, historians. In England this silent overlap was particularly prominent. E.H. Carr, Alfred Zimmern, and later Martin Wight were all trained as historians. In addition, many historians such as Arnold Toynbee or Herbert Butterfield were interested in themes related to International Relations. Apparently, the cross fertilization between History and IR, which has intensified over the past two decades has, in fact, longer historical and intellectual roots.

The rapprochement between historians and International Relations scholars has been noted not only from the perspective of IR, but also from that of History, where the study of IPT has seen a surge of interest and publications. Over the past two decades, the growing scholarly attention to the international, global and world dimensions of history has transformed the landscape of historical research. These transformations generated new research projects in the fields of intellectual history and the history of political thought, exploring international political thought in a historical perspective. Scholars have uncovered past trajectories of ideas and concepts about the international sphere, embedding them within the intellectual traditions of the history of political thought.

Thus, IPT emerged as a significant and innovative field, that seeks to shift the traditional state-centric narrative of intellectual history and the history of political thought to explore international, transnational and global political ideas. In this framework, the historian David Armitage (2004) announced an 'international turn' in intellectual history, where scholars honed in on themes that transcended the boundaries of states to highlight the transnational and even global dimension of the history of ideas. He argued that historians of political thought have rendered explicit what had previously been an implicit assumption of their studies, about the tendency of ideas to migrate, travel and connect people and places around the world.

The 'international turn' in the history of political thought was accompanied, it seems, by a parallel transformation in IR, which Duncan Bell (2009) described as the 'historical turn'. As historians of political thought abandoned methodological nationalism and adopted a more international outlook, a new path for a dialogue with IR has emerged. The contemporaneity of these processes may indicate that the two sub-fields are ready for a fruitful and insightful conversation.

The scholarly exchanges between IPT and Historical IR have created a rich, intellectual space for inter-disciplinary dialogue, which may prove particularly beneficial for three reasons. First, IPT scholarship may widen the theoretical horizons of IR scholars and lead to an in-depth engagement with ideas and concepts hitherto ignored. Second, IPT scholarship may help challenge conventional narratives in IR by honing in on concepts' historic origins. Third, Historical IR may provide a rich conceptual framework for IPT scholarship, in a dialogue attuned to both historical particularism and theoretical generalizability.

This chapter is not intended as an exhaustive or definitive account of the field, but rather an initial exploration of some of the salient aspects of a scholarly universe undergoing growth and transformation. Our argument proceeds as follows. The next section, Section 2, posits that the work of International Relations is inherently historical and ideational and charts but four ways in which this endeavour is pursued. Section 3 offers an overview of the uses of IPT in Historical IR, highlighting the work of scholars who actively engaged with the study of History and who sought to outline new paths to innovation in both contents and methods. Section 4 focuses on empire, a

theme that has received significant scholarly attention. Finally, in the conclusion, we discuss some of the implications of the closer interplay between Historical IR and IPT, and outline possible paths for future research.

2. Historical IR

The subfield of Historical IR has garnered much momentum since its foundation as a distinct section in the International Studies Association. However, to whatever extent the study of International Relations is predicated on an engagement with the past to understand or explain the present, or indeed predict the future, it is always inescapably historical and ideational. To make this claim is not to negate the many important ways in which this work differs. To draw on the classic essay by Quentin Skinner, this work might privilege texts in the hope it contains “timeless elements” in the form of “universal ideas”, even a “dateless wisdom” with “universal application”, it might privilege contexts of ‘religious, political, and economic factors’ as the ‘ultimate framework’ for discerning meaning, or it might opt for something in between (1969, pp. 3-4). Similarly, it might differ in its understanding of what constitutes the archive. In this vein, it could variously turn to a text or phenomena in its attempt at sense-making. Finally, it might be driven by distinct normative endeavours and assessments of what constitutes the abiding question or *problematique* at the heart of international relations, and how, where and why one ought to engage with it. These plural methods and ends testify to the multiple ways in which the study of IR engages with ideas and their historical genealogy, and recognises the importance of the past for thinking about the international. This recognition underpins George Lawson’s claim that ‘everyone who studies International Relations (IR) is a historian’ (2018, p. 75). In what follows, we chart four ways in which IR scholars deliberately and consciously engage with historical thought. We posit these four approaches tend to centre on normative, disciplinary, conceptual, and sociological questions, although conceding there is more overlap between them than our schema may suggest.

Normative International Relations’ engagements with historical thought long precedes the discipline’s deliberate engagement with historical methods that Duncan Bell (2009) described as the ‘historical turn’. Indeed, the second great debate we earlier alluded to did not so much result in the demise of historical work as much as it sharpened the cleavage across the Atlantic, which saw historical work continue to thrive in British IR. Normative IR was a fertile field for this flourishing. Normative IR engages with history primarily through what Renée Jeffery (2005) described as the ‘invention of tradition’, or the evocation and mobilisation of history in acts of self-definition and critique. It is to be found in Martin Wight’s (1991) world carved up between realists, rationalists, and revolutionaries. Equally, it is evident in international political theory’s turn to the past as a trove of ethical enlightenment, exemplified perhaps in Chris Brown, Terry Nardin and Nicholas Rengger’s (2002) *International Relations in Political Thought: Texts from the Ancient Greeks to the First World War*, which curates the works of fifty thinkers from Thucydides to Joseph Schumpeter. The purpose of the work was to introduce students and scholars of International Relations to ‘canonical’ texts and their historical and philosophical contexts.

Recent works in normative IR continue the historical work of constructing and interrogating tradition with the aim of exposition and critique. Thus, William Bain’s (2020) *Political Theology of International Order* seeks to uncover the medieval theological origins of international order to counter the narrative that the modern states system is the product of the gradual process of secularization. Similarly, in a bid to highlight the promise and perils of just war thinking Cian

O'Driscoll (2019) studies the twin thematic of victory and tragedy as implicated over time in the thought of just war scholars from Cicero to Michael Walzer.

If normative IR is explicitly engaged in the construction and interrogation of tradition, disciplinary work seeks to excavate the ideational origins of IR's endeavour. Lucian Ashworth's (2014) *A History of International Thought: From The Origins of the Modern State to the Academic International Relations*, for example, sought to shed light on the multiple narratives of the international's emergence. From interrogating the big bang moments of IR to their ameliorative proclivities, other work by Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira and John M. Hobson (2011) and Joseph McKay and Christopher David LaRoche (2018), for instance, seek to call into question the doxa upon which our origin stories are premised and the problems they in turn perpetuate. This disciplinary work has been further enriched by the recent exploration of the many silences and exclusions upon which IR is predicated. In foregrounding the lives and legacies of scholars associated with the Howard School, Robert Vitalis' (2015) *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*, invites us to interrogate whether international relations from its inception was not in fact about race relations. Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler's (2020) forthcoming edited collection, *Women's International Thought: A New History*, similarly seeks to recover and identify the work of neglected academic women in a bid to rewrite disciplinary history. These histories and attempts to redress them have largely centred on Anglo-America as the locus of IR. Albeit not entirely at odds with the discipline's development, these histories occlude a more plural, and indeed a truly international conception of the discipline's formation. Seeking to remedy this, Ayşe Zarakol's (2010) *After Defeat*, Ian Hall's (2015) *Radicals and Reactionaries in International Thought*, Robbie Shilliam's (2015) *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, and Martin Bayly's forthcoming work on the forgotten origins of South Asian IR ask what debates would be rendered audible, what paradigms perceptible, if we were to simply look beyond the Anglo-American archive.

Conceptual historical work at its core connotes a linguistic engagement with the past. This work tends to draw chiefly, albeit not exclusively, on methodologies championed by Reinhart Koselleck and Michel Foucault. If the former is typified by a turn to *Begriffsgeschichte*, the latter entails an engagement with genealogies. If the former is characterised by an exploration of the shifts in meaning over history, the latter analyses discourses or the ways in which power constructs knowledge over time. Both methods seek to denaturalize concepts and reveal their historic contingency. Although they vary in focal range, these approaches are not dissimilar to what is commonly (and problematically) referred to as the 'Cambridge School', which takes at its starting point our embeddedness in speech acts and language games.

Conceptual work in IR builds upon and expands these frames. Jens Bartelson seeks to examine 'the world war made' by focussing on the meaning of war from the early seventeenth to nineteenth century. To this end, he provides an analysis of the historical ontology of war, which attempts to chart not just conceptual shifts in the meaning of 'war' but what conceptions of war have presupposed (2017, p. 1). Similar assumptions about the historical roots of international concepts are contained in the postcolonial scholarship of Nivi Manchanda (2020) whose *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge* examines representations of gender, state and tribes to re-historicise Afghanistan and problematise colonial knowledge formation.

If conceptual IR is primarily concerned with the politics of knowledge production and shifts in language and meaning, historical sociology is primarily concerned with the societal. Historical sociologists are not alone in assuming societal bonds carry great importance in

explaining and analysing human action, but in the context of IR, they emphasise the co-constitutive nature of history and theory. As Tarak Barkawi and George Lawson elaborate, ‘theories arise historically, formed amid encounters between theorists and events and practices they experience and take part in’ (2017, p. 2). At its crux, it seeks to incorporate ‘temporality in the analysis of social processes’ (2017, p. 2). Lawson suggests it is best conceived as ‘oriented around two main thematics: first, the *transnational* and *global* dynamics that enable the emergence, reproduction and breakdown of social orders; and second, the *historical* emergence, reproduction and breakdown of transnational and global social forms’ (2018, chapter 6). To whatever extent historians of ideas privilege the ideational, historical sociologists, in their embeddedness in the social, seek to illustrate how the material and ideational are always inherently in dialogue with each other. Tarak Barkawi’s (2017) *Soldiers of Empire: Indian and British Armies in World War II* offers a postcolonial perspective on the making of the soldier and what animates them to participate in combat. Characteristic of Barkawi’s scholarship, he posits the imperial as the formation to best understand war as a political act and societal phenomena, and in the process illuminates the forgotten, interwoven, material histories erased by Eurocentric narratives of war. Contending revolutions are ‘inter-social all the way down’, George Lawson’s *Anatomies of Revolution* offers an account of how revolutions begin, unfold and end (2019, p. 9). Examining revolutions from England in the seventeenth Century to Ukraine in the twenty-first, he argues for the significance of revolutions not just as normative projects, but as analytical categories of social transformation and substantive processes which have shaped the modern world.

Historical IR is therefore a broad church united by a common endeavour, yet divided about the methods, objectives and locus of the study. Our fourfold division, however, is ultimately artifice. Normative concerns shape how we understand the archive, which concepts matter and why, what the right relationship is between the ideational and material, and indeed why we ask any historical question in the first place. Conceptual and sociological work are inextricably linked much in the same way languages are in society. Finally, each of these engagements with historical thought serve to make and unmake the discipline. In charting these differences, we have sought to illuminate something of the omnipresence of historical thought in the study of International Relations, suggesting that the debates and discussions which inhere in the field are somehow at their core about how and why we engage with history and ideas.

3. International Political Thought

International Political Thought lies in the interstices of International Relations and History, and consequently many scholars of IPT traverse both disciplines. This space is rendered possible by the parallel movement we earlier described. Indeed, if the last twenty years saw the inherently historical discipline of International Relations self-consciously embrace historical methods, it has also seen History embrace the ‘international’. The ‘international turn’ in intellectual history has been defined as one of the most transformative historiographical movements of the last decades (Armitage 2013, p. 18). Since the 1990s historians have become more attentive to the international, transnational and global dimensions of politics, transcending the national boundaries of history-writing (Bayly, Beckert, Connelly et. al 2004). It has been argued that the categories of politics are not reducible to the ‘state’, and that conventional narratives of national history have obfuscated rather than revealed many important themes in the history of political thought (Bartelson, 2009; Sluga, 2013; Rothschild, 2008; Rosenboim 2017).

Historians sought to define their subject matter as ‘global’, ‘transnational’ and ‘international’, although the differences between these categories have not always been clear. Some developments in the field of intellectual history were parallel to the emergence of historical sub-fields of international, transnational and global history, reflecting growing scholarly interest in human relations beyond the state. Iriye (2013) suggests that global and transnational history looks beyond national boundaries to explore interconnections across borders, discussing issues that concern humanity as a whole. By contrast, the focus on international history could be defined as the relations among nations as sovereign entities (Iriye 2013, pp. 10-12). While this distinction is not clear-cut or unchanging, it provides a useful starting point for investigating the abundance of recent scholarship on international political thought, often united not by common themes but by a common focus on larger, potentially world-spanning spaces.

One of the questions arising from the current literature in IPT regards canon-formation. Various studies pointed to a collection of key thinkers, leading intellectuals and practitioners who shaped international thought (Navari 2013b; Guilhot 2011). Some seek to challenge common perceptions of foundational figures in international thought. The history of British international thought has also received great attention, centring in particular on British liberal internationalists, their theories of world order and Britain’s role in it (Hall and Hill 2010; Hall 2012; Holthaus 2014; Sylvest 2014; Rosenboim 2014). While scholars have provided engaging studies of the international aspects of major political philosophers such as Grotius, Hobbes, Gentili and Kant, we would argue that international thought should not be extrapolated from the canon of political thought, or proceed by examining what ‘great political thinkers’ said about world politics and international affairs (Molloy 2017; Bain 2016; Costa López 2020). Studies of IPT should outflank the question of the existence and desirability of a canon of thinkers of international thought. Instead of building a new canon or reflecting on ‘canonical thinkers’, future research should investigate international thought by building an eclectic and transnational collection of thinkers united by a shared concern with the international dimension of politics (Keene 2017; Vergerio 2019).

The interplay of individuals and organizations can also provide a profitable field for the study of ‘minor’ or ‘mid-level’ thinkers of international relations (Umoren 2018; Pedersen 2015; Vitalis 2015). Historians and IR scholars have recently interrogated the writings of a group of British and American intellectuals and politicians, including Alfred Zimmern, Jan Smuts and Norman Angell, who are invested with the responsibility for shaping the ideology of American international interventionism, in partnership with the British Empire, to create a peaceful internationalist world order (Mazower, 2009; Ceadel, 2009; Baji, 2016). The interaction between intellectuals, public servants and policy-makers has also received the attention of historians, raising questions on the reception and impact of ideas in politics. Lawyers, civil servants and economists have signalled out as important links in connecting ideas to policies between the national and international spheres (Slobodian 2018; Wertheim 2020; Huber, Pietsch and Rietzler, 2019). Yet, as recent studies have shown, religious orders and their members were also significant contributors to developing and spreading ideas about world order (Moyn 2015; Erdmann 2005; Thompson 2015)

What are the spatial boundaries of IPT? Anglo-American collaboration has been important for the development of ideas about the international sphere, as historical configurations of world politics emerged in institutional frameworks such as Chatham House-based committee on ‘World Order’ and ‘Reconstruction’ (Williams, 2007). The claim that Britain and the United States were the birthplace of the academic discipline of IR in the twentieth century has justified, for many

historians, the focus on these countries as the main hubs for the development of international thought (Schmidt, 1998). One alternative account highlights the importance of the imperial dimension for the foundation of IR as a discipline and for the development of international thought as a whole (Davis, Thakur and Vale, 2020). The global perspective that such a narrative opens up challenges Anglo-American historiography and constructs new political spaces for the evolution of ideas about the international. These novel interpretations of history of IR as a discipline set an example for the potential and importance of the active exchange between IR scholars and historians of international political thought.

Our vision of IPT calls for a more expansive, creative approach not just to the questions of the canon, institutions and geography, but also methodology. Despite the many merits of a contextualist approach, as Joel Isaac (2016) reminds us, IPT ought to also offer concrete philosophical arguments for debate. Even in regard to ‘minor thinkers’ or ‘mid-level thinkers’ whose ideas may be limited in philosophical depth and theoretical range, it may be useful to enhance the contextualist approach with a more abstract analysis of their arguments. At the same time, contextualism serves as an important check on theoretical abstraction that bears little relevance to history or practical philosophy. The mission of IPT need not end with discussing past international theorists in their own terms but can extend to bringing to the fore their relevance to our own problems, their value in generating new theoretical arguments.

4. Empire and international thought

IPT is still very much a work in progress. The ever-growing historical scholarship expanded the field of investigation to include various eras and divergent themes. In his book on the foundations of international thought, Armitage (2013) suggested that historians of international thought should explore the transition from a system of empires to the current system of states. Recent studies in IPT have shown that space between empires and states was complex, multi-layered and sometimes incoherent. In this section, we will look at a selection of studies that provide novel interpretations of empire and imperialism in the history of international thought. These path-breaking studies, we argue, represent an important contribution not only to historical studies on empires and the international, but also to IR, by offering an inspiring example for the intellectual potential embodied in interdisciplinary exchange.

The interplay of imperial and international relations, and the idea of imperial political unity in the Victorian age were identified as fundamental themes in the study of international thought (Pitts, 2005; Mehta, 1999; Muthu, 2008; Mantena, 2010; Armitage, 2013; Bell, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Pitts (2005), Mehta (1999) and Mantena (2010) have offered long-term historical vistas on the implication of liberalism in imperial projects, drawing on the writings of leading liberal thinkers including J.S. Mill, Adam Smith and Henry Maine. These works also emphasize the highly interdisciplinary nature of Victorian international thought, where thinkers have built on their knowledge in law, economics and philosophy to theorize empire and the international sphere. The Victorian imaginary of world order is further developed in the scholarship of Duncan Bell (2007a, 2007b), who explores the notion of ‘greater Britain’ as an influential political trope in imperial England, and interrogates the lasting legacy of empire on liberal internationalism (2016). Together, these studies shed light on the persisting contradictions of liberalism and offer insights into the continuities between liberalism’s past configurations and its interpretations in IR today.

A number of studies focussed on the interwar years, with particular emphasis on the development of liberal internationalism as a political ideology in the age of imperial decline (Laqua,

2011; Gorman, 2012; Pugh, 2012; Bisceglia, 1982; Parmar, 2002; Navari, 2013a). Drawing clear temporal boundaries has not always been an easy task in the study of the history of international thought. Casper Sylvest (2009) discussed traditions and innovation in British liberal internationalism, questioning the claims of originality often attached to interwar theories, and pointing out the continuities between Victorian and Edwardian international thought, in particular regarding moral universalism. International or universal morality continued to play part in mid-century international thought, yet the relations between morality and reason were put under scrutiny as the imperial world order fell apart. A different interpretation of international morality, highlighting the repressive and exclusive aspects of the liberal imperial mindset, is advanced in Jeanne Morefield's (2005, 2014) studies of Alfred Zimmern and Gilbert Murray, as well as in her later work on the legacy of empire. Imperial apologetic patterns of international thought permeated mid-century internationalism, but came under increasing criticism as a more pluralistic approach took centre stage. Morefield provides a compelling account of the historical foundation of American foreign policy in the early twentieth-first century, by outlining the intellectual foundations of contemporary ideas in the European experience of empire.

Another strand of international thought explores critiques of empire as a motivation for global political form (Long, 1996; Porter, 2007). In a similar critical vein, John M. Hobson discusses the impact of empire and Eurocentrism on the evolution of International Relations theory. Emphasizing the close connection between the racialized and discriminating imperial worldview and the development of International Relations theory, Hobson (2012) levels a poignant critique at current theoretical positions that fail to take stock of their problematic political assumptions. The discriminatory heritage of International Relations theory is also the subject of Robert Vitalis' aforementioned study, which focuses on the foundation of the American discipline of IR. Vitalis (2015) highlights the important contribution of black international thinkers, providing a novel history of international thought through the writings of such figures as Merze Tate and Ralph Bunche. Adom Getachew's (2019) study of international political thought after empire follows a similar pattern by showing the importance of Black international thinkers for making the post-imperial world order. The historical work undertaken by these scholars goes a long way to reveal the blind-spots of existing scholarship and reveal its limits. Their call for a more inclusive, self-aware and reflexive international theory is grounded in the study of the history of international thought in the twentieth century.

The meticulous and original studies on empire by historians of international thought have contributed to a better understanding of the theoretical complexities around the political category of empire and challenged conventional narratives about the formation of the contemporary international order. Such works represent historical scholarship with a deep theoretical foundation, conversant with IR. The conceptual and historiographical influence of such ground-breaking works on empire can be traced in recent publications that employ new perspectives on the history of international thought to challenge common knowledge in IR (Zarakol, 2010; Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam, 2014; Bayly, 2018; Phillips and Sharman, 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illustrate the rich conceptual and methodological exchange that IPT facilitates between historians and scholars of International Relations. As exemplified in the burgeoning work on empire, IPT promises to widen the theoretical horizons of IR scholars and challenge their conventional narratives, just as Historical IR serves to provide a theoretical

framework cognisant of the abstract and the particular. In the process, historians and IR scholars are called to confront the constitution and representation of the international: what it is, where it comes from, where it is going, and our role as scholars in understanding and explaining it. In many ways, this interdisciplinary conversation has only just begun. As it continues, we would like to signpost three themes that merit further research in the future.

First, both IPT and Historical IR are characterised by a significant lack of attention to gender issues, and to women as international thinkers and activists. The current state of affairs is limited to the examination of a few 'key' women scholars, who have by now joined the canon of modern international thought, most notably Hannah Arendt. Yet, as some scholars have argued, there are many more sources on the international thought of women that need to be unearthed and explored (Owens, 2018). Thus, Historical IR scholars with an interest in international thought can follow in the footsteps of intellectual historians and investigate archival collections to discover the contribution of women to the development of international thought. Although this examination of women's place in the canon is slowly gaining momentum, this focus remains confined to the work in the Anglo-American and Western-European archive. In addition, issues related to gender, feminism and the household are still relegated to the margins of the history of international thought, and rarely feature in Historical IR. More work can be undertaken to reveal the implications of gender-based social structures on international theory, and to highlight the historical trajectories of feminist critiques of International Relations.

The second theme that deserves further exploration is non-European histories of political thought. The rise of 'global' and 'world' intellectual history has been accompanied not only by remarkable new scholarship on international thought in Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also by a greater awareness of the spatial and conceptual limits of the existing scholarship, in both IPT and IR (Moyn and Sartori, 2013; Shilliam, 2010; Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam, 2014). It seems banal, four decades after Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, to note that most of the histories of international thought that we have are written from the perspective of the West. Existing literature in IPT and Historical IR has been predominantly focused on the United States, Britain and a small selection of European states. Although this is gradually shifting, the intellectual blind-spots include not only most of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, but also 'minor' European states, such as Italy, the Scandinavian countries, Spain and Greece.

To overcome this bias, future scholarship needs to engage directly with knowledge produced in other geopolitical spheres. Such a goal seems to also require linguistic skills, that are often lacking in the Anglophone world, where many scholars base their research exclusively on English sources. Mastering more than one language is a necessary condition for grappling with the history and evolution of ideas about the international sphere. For this purpose, transnational and trans-linguistic collaborations may prove a fruitful way forward. For example, there is much scope for collaborative projects that seek to outline the evolution of international thought beyond the English speaking intellectual spheres, or at least exploring English sources in different locations, such as South Africa (Thakur and Vale, 2020). Future research in IPT and Historical IR may also demand greater linguistic abilities, novel archival sources and intellectual dexterity in a range of cultural and political spheres, to investigate the material and ideational history of the international on a truly global scale. Through new research strategies, that widen the geographic and linguistic scope of research, the contribution of Historical IR and IPT can transcend the conversation between these two sub-fields, and embody an innovative and ambitious path for the advancement of the disciplines of History and IR as a whole.

Finally, we would like to propose that future studies in Historical IR and IPT extend their gaze beyond the ‘usual suspects’, the major thinkers and the Great Powers, to look at figures and subjects at the margins of the international order. Minor thinkers can often be better representatives of the common knowledge and views of their era than the exceptional ‘great thinker’ whose writings are more frequently studied. By widening our pool of international thinkers, we may hope to have a more diverse, pluralist and accurate map of the intellectual development of ideas about the international sphere. Engaging in new sources for understanding the international sphere can mean not only expanding the search geographically, into territories and regions hitherto excluded from the ‘canon’ of international thought but also digging deeper into the past and investigating a longer temporal arch of international thinking. Engaging with medieval and early modern international thinkers beyond the well-known canon of ‘great thinkers’ may provide impetus for a fresh theoretical perspective. Similarly, there may be much to be gained by understanding ‘thought’ as not merely contained in political works narrowly construed, but as expressed in art, music, and literature.

The interplay between Historical IR and IPT may seem to lead smoothly to positive and optimistic conclusions about the future of such conversations. It is evident that historians and IR scholars can both benefit from a closer dialogue, which may open up new paths for research and construct new theoretical frameworks. At the same time, scholars should not lose sight of the fundamental differences between the underlying assumptions and objectives of research in IR and in History. While contextualized studies of the history of international thought may enrich our understanding of the evolution of the foundational political categories of IR, we should not neglect drawing theoretical implications for thinking about IR today. The challenge of future research will be to reflect on the desirable and possible means to translate historical case studies in political thought into an analysis of IR relevant for our own concerns. Such a challenge might draw historians and IR scholars apart, but at the same time, may lead to the crystallization of research in Historical IR as an insightful and rich approach to the study of international relations.

Further Readings

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Duncan Bell (2016) *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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